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HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA,

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TO

BLACKSOD,

THE SHORTEST, THE SAFEST, AND
THE BEST ROUTE

FOR

MAILS AND PASSENGERS

BETWEEN

THE DOMINION OF CANADA AND
GREAT BRITAIN.

BY

OCEANUS.

DUBLIN
M. H. GILL AND SON,
1895.

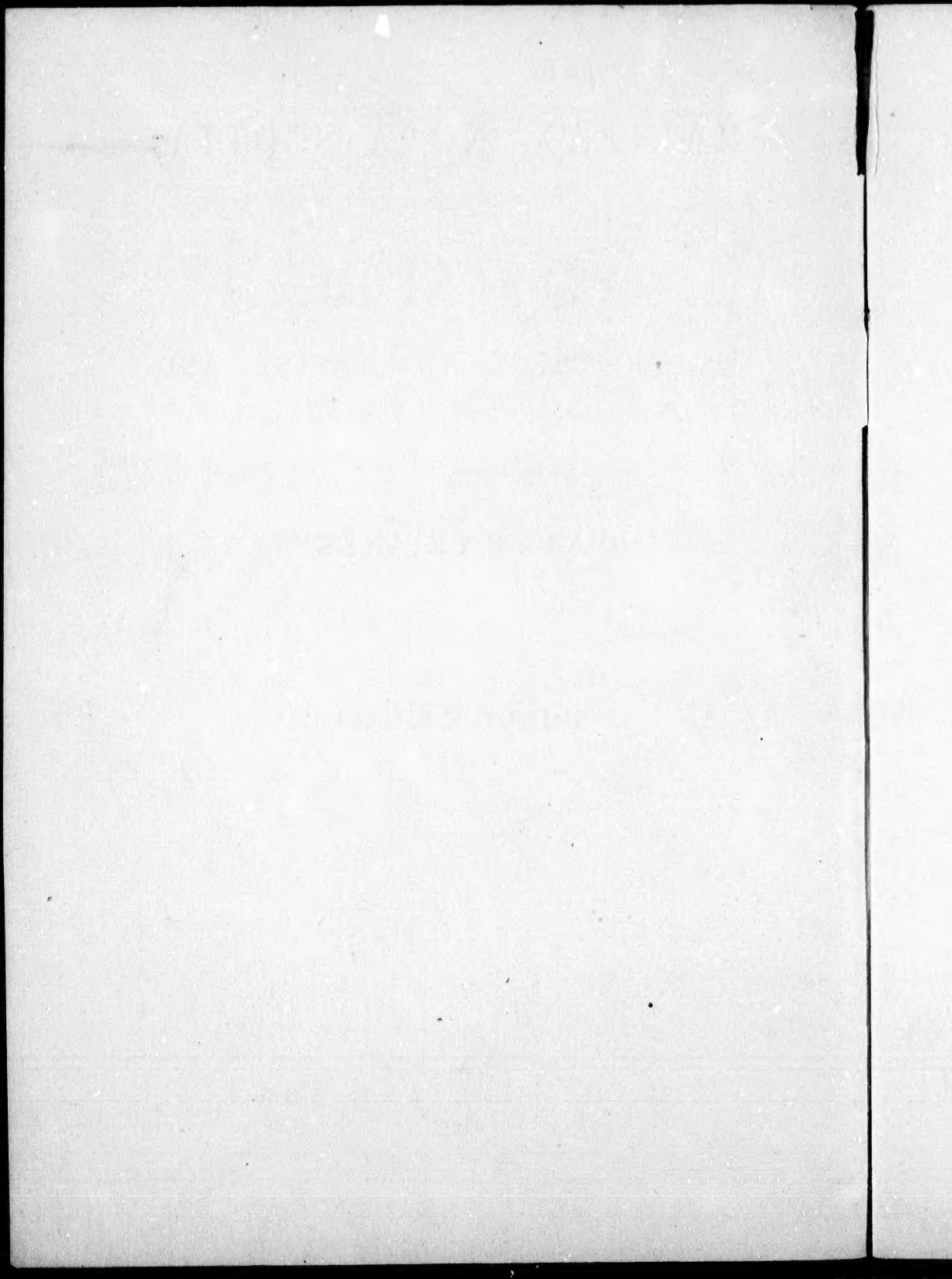
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H A L I F A X , N . S . ,

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TO
THE MEMORY
OF THE LATE
SIR JOHN THOMPSON,
Premier of Canada,

Who so cordially received the Irish Deputation that waited upon him in London, to advocate the superior claims of Blacksod Bay as the Terminus on this side of the Atlantic for the proposed new Line of Mail Steamers from the Dominion of Canada;

THIS PAMPHLET
IS REVERENTLY DEDICATED BY THE
AUTHOR.

THE Imperial and the Canadian Governments have under consideration a project for the conveyance of the mails of the Dominion from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to some port on this side of the Atlantic not yet decided upon. It is very much to be desired that those who are intrusted with the carriage of so important a matter will not be led away by any narrow-minded policy, but will be guided throughout by the consideration of what is best in the interests of commerce and the public weal, with full regard for future development. There is no need to hurry. Mistakes made in a moment of impulse are not always so speedily remedied. Let abundant time be given to it, and while it is *sub judice* the magnificent Bay of Blacksod calls for, and ought, and I hope will, receive the first and greatest consideration, because it is on the Atlantic seaboard, is nearest to America, and, as I shall show in the following pages, eminently suited to become the terminus of a first-class line of mail steamers.

Blacksod Bay is one of the finest bays in the world—immense capacity, great depth, well landlocked, good shelter, safe anchorage, and no fogs. The Coast of Ireland Pilot says that, “Blacksod Bay is one of the finest bays on the west coast of Ireland, is easy of access, and affords secure anchorage for a large number of vessels ; it was always a principal resort of Her Majesty’s ships stationed on this coast, and one for which they never hesitate to run in bad weather.

A secure roadstead is afforded to vessels of heavy draught on the west side of the bay below Ardelly point, sheltered from the violence of the sea by the Mullet Peninsula. The entrance between Duvillanmore and Saddle Head the north point of Achill Island, is about three miles wide, with a depth of 26 fathoms, and is easily recognised by day by the bold promontory of Achill, 2182 feet high, and at night by Black Rock light, standing on the north side of the approach." Knight, in his excellent history of Erris, "Erris in the Irish Highlands," states that, "the entrance of Blacksod Bay between Devilaun and Achill Head is $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles wide, at Doohooma Head $4\frac{1}{4}$, and at Kanfinalta, the narrowest part, 3. The greatest breadth opposite Elly is $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and its average as far as Claggan is $5\frac{1}{2}$. The superficial expanse of Blacksod Bay is 45 square miles." Knight then proceeds to quote from Makenzie's soundings:—"The extent it has of three fathoms is ~~25~~ square miles, at 5 fathoms 8 miles. This extent would float vessels of the largest size in the Navy. Ordinary steamers and trading vessels do not exceed 12 feet water, but suppose vessels so large as to draw 15 feet, there would be 20 square miles at least for holding such vessels. Not a single sunken rock in all this space, except one off Saleen Harbour; Corrigeenmore, far to the left of the entrance, being a half-tide rock. The whole extent of sheltered shore in Blacksod Bay is $63\frac{1}{2}$ miles within the limits of Doohooma Head and Blacksod Point. Great safety, extent, and most westerly position, with so much difference of time in its favour, are the great leading features to make

Blacksod Bay the port most desired for a terminus of such vast communication as that between America and Great Britain." Knight next gives Mr. Ball's, C.E., evidence before a select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Works, 12th June, 1835:— "Blacksod Bay is very large and roomy, and works to any extent might be constructed within it to hold ships ; it also stands much seaward into the Atlantic. At Blacksod is to be found an abundance of the finest granite in the world, extremely well suited for engineering works of all kinds. Do you consider Blacksod Bay particularly well suited for steam navigation with the shores of America ? I do ; for it lies near the straight line drawn on the arc of a sphere. Black Rock, outside Blacksod, is but 1610 geographical miles from St. John's, Newfoundland. Would vessels at all times be able to leave Blacksod Bay ? Oh, yes ; steam vessels would ; it has a large, roomy, and spacious entrance, of great area within, and three, four, five, and seven fathoms deep, where ship's basins to any extent might be constructed. Achill Head, which forms the south entrance to Blacksod Bay, is the most remarkable headland on the west coast of Ireland. The saddle of Achill Head is elevated above the sea 2182 feet, and can be seen in clear weather seaward, on the waters of the Atlantic, at a distance of more than 58 miles. This gigantic headland is, therefore, one of the most unerring guides to the mariner when he makes land crossing the Atlantic from America to the west coast of Ireland that can be anywhere found on the coast, being remarkable for its contour, height,

and seaward position, such as no mariner, even in the night during clear starlight, could easily mistake. A lighthouse on Black Rock, which lies seaward to the entrance of Blacksod Bay, would be required if Blacksod Bay is destined to become the connecting point of Western Europe with the New World." Since this evidence was given, a lighthouse has been erected on Black Rock and another at Blacksod, so that now the entrance to the bay and the bay itself are thoroughly lighted.

The following is an extract from a letter of S. Shiel, Esq. :—" It is to be observed that Mr. Ball gives emphatic significance to the fact that Blacksod Bay is on the direct arc of a sphere for the nearest point in America, St. John's, Newfoundland; or Halifax, Nova Scotia. Vessels would, in conveying mails, passengers, or merchandise to these places, have to traverse only the base of a triangle, while vessels engaged in the same transit and sailing from Galway or Queenstown would have to participate in two sides of a triangle. The value of this advantage in favour of Blacksod Bay is the length, or nearly so, of a perpendicular or deflection, let fall from Queenstown or other southern or western Irish port on the base or arc of a sphere running from Achill Head to any of the ports named in America. To the advantage of being on the arc of a sphere, Blacksod Bay possesses this other, that it is ten degrees west of Greenwich, while Queenstown is only 17 minutes west of the 8th meridian. This gives a gain in favour of Blacksod Bay of 1 degree 43 minutes. A degree of latitude at the equator measures 60 geographical miles. At Blacksod

it measures 36. The westing of Blacksod Bay over Queenstown is then 60 miles, and with the advantage of being on the arc of a sphere and free from any perpendicular, this westernmost bay is in effect 120 miles west of Queenstown."

Blacksod Bay and Broadhaven are now united. Of the latter, the Coast of Ireland Pilot says that, "it is a snug little harbour, and well sheltered. The entrance abreast Cashil Point is half a mile wide, with 8 and 9 fathoms water, whence it extends in a south-westerly direction for $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles. A canal at Belmullet connects Blacksod and Broadhaven bays, available for vessels of 8 feet draught." (And it can be deepened to allow the largest vessels through.) "There is a good market at Belmullet, it being the emporium of the greater part of Erris and Ballycroy." There is a telegraph and telephone office here, so that the whole coast of Blacksod Bay is now connected by wire—telegraph from Achill to Ballycroy, Ballycroy to Bangor, Bangor to Belmullet, and telephone from Belmullet to Blacksod. There is also a meteorological office, whence weather reports are sent several times daily to the head office at London. What could be more satisfactory than all this?

There are several harbours in Blacksod Bay, which at a moderate outlay could be made available almost immediately to accommodate Atlantic liners. I shall mention four—Bull's Mouth, Claggan, Elly, and Tarmon. Bull's Mouth has an opening of 900 feet and a depth of 6 fathoms; Claggan, $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Belmullet, 6 fathoms; Elly, the favourite anchorage, 5 fathoms; Tarmon, 7 fathoms. Of the four I believe Tarmon to

be the best, because it has greatest depth of water, is easy of access, well sheltered by Tarmon hill, 332 feet, and at the entrance of the bay. This, however, is a matter for engineers. The expense of a line of railway and a pier at any of these places is all that is needed, and the cost of these is a mere nothing to the gain, which would be enormous.

So far I have only spoken of the Blacksod Bay and Halifax route as a mail line. It now remains for me to say something of it as a passenger and goods line. The shortest passage coupled with the greatest safety are what passengers crossing the Atlantic most desire, and both these are combined in this route. It is the shortest, because it is only 1980 miles. It is the safest, because there are no dangerous headlands, no rocks, no shallows ; but the broad Atlantic without, and a capacious, secure, and well sheltered bay within. For men of business, time is a matter of the highest importance ; and every hour wasted upon the Atlantic is for them so much time lost. In these days of great commercial enterprise, quick transit is what is so much sought after. It will be moreover the cheapest. On account of the shortness of the voyage, less fuel will be used, less victuals consumed. These form an important saving in expenditure. The company running this line can consequently carry passengers at a less fare than others. But if it be not so, but higher, passengers who could afford it would be willing to pay the difference for the advantages this line offers—the shortest, the safest, the best passage. For passengers from Great Britain and the Continent it would be especially attractive. Instead of tediously long

voyages as now from Hamburg, Liverpool, and Southampton, it would be varied by short sea trips, pleasant overland runs, with the advantage of seeing the country as they passed, and finishing up with the shortest sea passage to America. For Americans it would be still more attractive, for they would be at once introduced into some of the most picturesque scenery of Ireland—Erris, Achill, and Connemara. The cliff scenery of Blacksod Bay is unsurpassed. Ben Chroghan is over 2,000 feet high, and is the most stupendous precipice in the three kingdoms. On their course eastwards they could visit the Giant's Causeway, the lake district of England, the Highlands of Scotland ; and if for the Continent, go direct to Germany, thence to Switzerland and France, returning by the south of England and the south of Ireland, and *via* Blacksod home. After a few years, when this line would be in efficient working order and well advertised, there can be little doubt that it will become the fashionable route of the future, and the one most run upon.

Mercantile Traffic.—Liners chartered to convey mails and passengers from Blacksod would have already picked up their cargoes at one or more ports just as at present, and arriving at Blacksod would there receive both mails and passengers. But a good and ever-increasing trade may be done here. We can export fish, woollen stuffs, and granite ; and import very largely flour and Indian corn, which would be carried inland right across the country.

The other bays which are likely to receive attention are—Moville, Galway, Queenstown, and Southampton.

Moville is not on the western seaboard. It is merely used as a port of call by vessels taking the northern route. But there is no reason why Blacksod should not be used instead, if the same facilities were afforded it. The Coast of Ireland Pilot says that, "Lough Foyle is for the most part occupied with shallows."

Galway Bay does not now receive the attention it formerly did, and very properly ; correctly speaking, it is not a bay, for it has an opening of 21 miles, and is exposed to all the fury of the Atlantic storms. The only shelter it has is that from the Arran Islands, and the merest acquaintance with it will show how inadequate they are. The Coast of Ireland Pilot says that, "when the sea is high, the swell through the north sound rolls along the shore of the north island, breaking furiously on the banks, and depriving it of the shelter it might be supposed to afford against the westerly winds." To quote from an able letter, the writer of which conceals his identity under "X" :— "This is the sound that would have to be used, and this is the kind of shelter that the north and largest of the Arran Islands affords to the bay of Galway." "Although possessing several snug creeks suited for small vessels," says the Coast of Ireland Pilot, "Galway Bay affords no well sheltered anchorage for large ships." The natural defects of Galway Bay are so great that no amount of money and engineering skill can ever overcome them, so as to make it a harbour suited to the present wants and future need of Atlantic commerce. To quote again from "X" :—"Contrast Blacksod and Galway as ports of call, and the superiority of the former will become

more evident. The mails are, say, to be delivered at Galway, and there is a cargo for Belfast, Glasgow, or Liverpool. Before this cargo can be delivered, the vessel has 32 miles of bay and 90 miles in the open Atlantic to traverse before it can reach the latitude of Blacksod. These together, with the 80 miles already against this route, give—deducting 15 miles for distance out of Blacksod—a total of 187 miles."

Queenstown.—The Coast of Ireland Pilot says of Cork Harbour that, "Turbot bank and harbour rock are nearly in the middle of the entrance" (and the entrance is rather narrow), "and much in the way of large ships working in and out. On passing the entrance the harbour at once unfolds itself, but a comparatively small portion of its wide expanse is available for navigation, the greater part of it being occupied by shallows." "The route to Cork Harbour," says Mr. Doyle, "from the Atlantic is stormy. The liners have frequently to run in the face of south-west winds and to round Cape Clear, which is always rough ; and there are fogs when steamers have to slacken speed, and consequently lose time. What, then, with storms from the south-west and fogs at other times, the liners are sometimes a day or two late at Queenstown and New York, and occasionally neither mails nor passengers can be landed, but have to be taken to Liverpool." Further, the mails have to be transferred to a tender and conveyed to shore ; at Blacksod they could be put upon the train in waiting.

Liverpool.—The Sailing Directions for the west coast of England say :—"When approaching either St. George's Channel or the Bristol Channel from the

Atlantic no opportunity of ascertaining and of progressively correcting the ship's position by astronomical observations should be neglected. Fogs, bad weather, and the long nights of winter frequently render it impossible to obtain a position by these means; in which case the approach to these channels should be made with extreme caution, as under such circumstances the course steered, the log, lead, and nature of the bottom are the seaman's only guide."

"In a S.W. gale, when accompanied by rain, the wind blows in violent gusts, and sometimes veers suddenly to the N.W., North, or even N.E. without losing strength."

"In crossing the bar during strong north-westerly winds, at which times there is a considerable sea, a vessel should wait until there is at least five feet more water on the bar than the draught of the vessel."

"The entrance to the Mersey is obstructed by banks to the distance of six or eight miles off-shore. The numerous sands which encumber the entrance of the Mersey will be better understood by a reference to the chart than by reading the most elaborate description—in fact, any attempt to convey by words correct ideas of the extent and form of these banks, and the intricate channels between them, would be useless."

"The banks within the river, in addition to those at the entrance, are three—Pluckington Bank, Devil's Bank, and Cheshire Shore Bank."

Fogs are frequent both inside and outside the river, and there are no fewer than six fog signals.

Southampton.—The Channel Pilot says that, "It is absolutely necessary when approaching the entrance

of the English Channel, and until a landfall is made, to neglect no opportunity of ascertaining and of progressively correcting the ship's position by astronomical observation. Fogs, bad weather, and the long nights of winter frequently render it impossible to obtain even the latitude by this means, in which case the approach either to the Scilly Islands or to Ushant should be made with extreme caution ; because under such circumstances the course steered, the log, the lead, and to a certain degree the nature of the bottom are seaman's only guide."

"A S.W. gale is most dangerous in the eastern part of the Channel, for, when accompanied with rain, the wind blows in violent gusts, and sometimes veers suddenly to N.W., North, or even N.E., without losing strength. Fogs are frequent in all parts of the Channel, and may occur at any time of the year."

"The mariner, on entering the Channel, should bear in mind that from the ever-increasing traffic in these narrow waters one of the greatest dangers to its safe navigation lies in the risk of collision, especially in hazy or foggy weather : this should at all times call for the utmost vigilance and care. It is well to remember that in addition to the numerous steamers and sailing vessels following the ordinary track, and to numbers of the latter crossing and recrossing it in turning to the windward, as well as fleets of trawlers which may occasionally be met with, and mail and passenger steamers of high speed passing and repassing, and crossing his track nearly at right angles.' Fancy all this in a night fog ! Who that values his life would expose it to so many and such great

dangers? "Bramble Bank," says the Channel Pilot, "is a vast accumulation of sand and gravel, nearly blocking up the entrance to Southampton water." Southampton Channel is only half a mile wide, with mud banks on either side, which dry at low water. Compare this with Blacksod Bay—but why speak of comparison? Cork Harbour, the Mersey, and Southampton put together would not equal in depth and extent, putting out of question its westward position, Blacksod Bay.

The following are the distances, and in making them out I have consulted the best sources; the Chart, Reed's Tables of Distances, the Agents of the various routes, &c.

Blacksod	to Halifax, N.S.	...	1980	Knots
Queenstown	"	"	2100	"
Liverpool	"	"	2342	"
Southampton	"	"	2497	"

Blacksod Bay, at Bull's Mouth and Queenstown, are about equi-distant from Kingstown. But if a more remote point be taken to which it may be desirable to extend the railway, and admit as we must that a mail train travels at a higher rate of speed than a steamer, this extra distance will be run over in less time than the mails can be transferred from a liner to a tender and landed at Queenstown, so that the advantage which Blacksod has over Queenstown on the ocean would remain unaffected. From Kingstown to London—the route for both is the same. Liverpool is 201 miles from London, Southampton $78\frac{3}{4}$.

Should it be contemplated at some future time to give Scotland a special train service for its mails,

Blacksod suits the purpose eminently. The Dominion Scotch mails would in that case be conveyed from Blacksod *via* Belfast to Glasgow, where they would probably arrive as soon as the Dominion English mails would arrive in London. Moreover, the two greatest centres of commerce in the north, Belfast and Glasgow, would be brought into more intimate contact. If this be realised, and I think credit may be given to the hard-headed northerns to realise it, if any people can, the German Government may find it more convenient than the present tedious system to transfer their American mails to this route, from Hamburg or Bremen *via* Leith, Glasgow, Belfast, Blacksod, to Halifax. This may seem far-fetched. Be it so. But at any rate it serves to show the possibilities which Atlantic commerce with Blacksod is capable of developing.

There is no desire to interfere with the trade of Southampton or Liverpool, or the little that Queenstown is permitted to enjoy. That the commerce of England should continue to prosper is our earnest wish, but we feel that an equally generous spirit ought to be shown towards us. And as the project now under consideration for the conveyance of the mails of the Dominion of Canada to Great Britain by a special first-class line of steamers is altogether new, we cannot be considered as desiring to interfere with the established trade of any port in asking that Blacksod Bay, because of its excellence, seaward position, and fitness, be made the terminus of the Atlantic liners on this side of the ocean.

The Canadian Government has ever been gener-

ously disposed to us, the Imperial Government is a Home Rule one, and we have been told times without number that there is a growing feeling in England that full justice must be done to Ireland—and for the credit of England not a moment too soon ; with so much in our favour, it cannot be considered that we are looking for something unreasonable in asking that for which we believe we have the strongest claim, and which Blacksod Bay on its own merits demands. Come, see, and then judge for yourselves.

